

STATEMENT OF
AMY CLARK
SPOUSE
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 24, 2007

Dear Members of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs of the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs. I am here to speak on behalf of all Veterans not just my Husband Russell E. Clark whom is a Viet-Nam Veteran himself. I, at the time didn't know what Viet-Nam was, I was just a child so therefore I didn't live Viet-Nam, but I am living it now every day with my husband Russell. I can't tell you how much it pains me to see a once vibrant man, now just a skeleton of what he used to be. Let me share with you why I say I am now living Viet-Nam. On January 8th 2007, Russell was in the hospital and I went to see him and Russell said, "There is a card from a doctor he wants you to call him." Which the date I just mentioned is our wedding anniversary. So I stepped outside to return the call to the doctor. The doctor said, "Mrs. Clark I am sorry to inform you that your husband has Lung Cancer." I said "Well since you have ruined my day, my life and my anniversary why don't you just tell me how bad the situation is?" He declined and said he would come the next day to the hospital and talk to Mr. Clark and me. Of course I was shattered and didn't tell my husband.

The problem with the VA is that there is too much red tape when a situation arises such as this. That is why claims sit on someone's desk or just get ignored completely until it is too late. There is bureaucratic doublespeak (taken from the article in the Lakeland Ledger Dated Sunday April 15th 2007). More truer words couldn't have been spoken. Yes, the VA offers you a book of benefits that you may be entitled too. But, try and get them. It is totally ridiculous that there are so many forms and questions to answer for even the most minimal benefits. I can tell you that to date I have over 400 pages of documentation that I have turned into the VA just for Mr. Clark, thus leading me to the next point that the system must be changed so that justice can be given to all veterans and their families. I have had to stop working and quit going to college to stay home and care for my husband. This system is just so unqualified. People need education on how to apply for benefits. It is extremely overwhelming to have to wade through the mountains of paperwork that the VA requires. There is no communication set up to help civilian's understand what needs to be done and the proper procedures to go through. I was fortunate to find Ernie Roberts and Donna Adams two very knowledgeable people to help me with my husband's situation which is still not resolved. Mr. Clark's time is short and we need to change things now. I can't even speak to the VA unless they speak to Mr. Clark first due to privacy issues, is what I am told. Well to be quite frank about the matter, there are days when Mr. Clark can't speak clearly because of the medication he is on for his cancer.

1. When a veteran requests a fiduciary it should be granted. No one should be threatened and told that whatever benefits you are getting will be stopped while that process is being taken care of - How terrible to be threatened that way.

2. The older veterans, especially the Viet Nam veterans, who have been shoved under the carpet for many years and the veterans coming home now, seem to get their benefits at the drop of a hat.

3. No one should have to produce documentation such as a morning report which is what I was requested to do. Needless to say, Mr. Clark happens to have just that in his possession, of which I am sure not many veterans do.

4. The nonsense about having this medal or that medal is totally ridiculous, when in fact John Kerry threw his medals over the wall at the White House some time ago for all the world to see.

5. When a veteran has a DD2-14, that should be sufficient information to show what time they put in the service and where they were.

6. Does it matter what their job was? Of course not. They gave so that we may live in the United States of America the land of the free and the home of the brave.

7. The Blue Water Act was a good thing, but still there are veterans that flew B66's and can't get benefits, because they can't prove they were in Viet Nam.

8. Life insurance policies issued by the Veteran's Life Insurance Company must be changed so that they can be assignable to a funeral home. Most people don't have the money for funeral expenses just sitting in the bank.

9. Buddy letters shouldn't be requested as too many veterans have been killed in action or died along the way.

Mr. Clark himself was told we are just going to keep burying the paper work until all the Viet Nam veterans are dead and then we won't have to pay off on any claims. This is just stupid someone's idea of a bad joke. Mr. Clark has been fighting a separate issue for PTSD for quite sometime and each time he is denied because they say there isn't enough

information to prove he has PTSD. Yet Mr. Clark has documentation in his possession from the Veterans Hospital in Tampa Florida stating his main Diagnosis is PTSD. Imagine that if you will. One thing stated in that documentation is you don't have all the symptoms. Well if I am depressed, do I have to all the symptoms of depression to be diagnosed with depression?

The issue of stressors that the VA looks for just seems to be more bureaucratic doublespeak. I was told the stressors could be things like gunfire, picking up dead bodies, shooting women and children etc. Mr. Clark himself was part of assassinations - If that isn't a stressor I don't know what is.

Now the new stressors have come out just recently, such as diabetes, heart disease, and strokes and on and on. So if the documentation is provided by civilian doctors that should be good enough. Why torment these veteran's any more? Give them what they deserve.

It is my understanding as well that the VA doesn't like when a veteran gets a civilian doctor or any civilian information for that matter. They claim they are too overworked and too underpaid to handle all of these themselves so why put up a stink when it comes to the documentation. If the documentation is presented that should be good enough. I was told I could get a "rent a doctor" to sign any documentation that Mr. Clark might need and it would be accepted. What is all this craziness? Let's take care of all the veterans but let us take care of the older veterans first and make the younger ones wait just like the Viet Nam veteran's have had to wait. This system is just wrong.

1. When a veteran dies and his/ her spouse and children are entitled to DIC. Let's stop the nonsense and just have a short form for them to fill out and turn in the necessary documentation and not be told this will take 6-8 months or longer to complete. It is no wonder the Department of Veteran's Affairs can't get their jobs done. They make it more difficult on themselves.

2. Each veteran should be given a packet the first time they ever walk into a VA office with all the forms that they may need all in a nice little packet since the VA is so big on paperwork.

I had the most awful time getting added to be my husband's dependent as when we went to the VA in 2004. They filled out a form making me his dependent, but only in the event that he should die in a VA facility. The man that did this was Alex Benjamin, whom I understand is no longer with the VA. He never told us that because Mr. Clark's first wife was deceased and that because I had been married before, that we would have to present the former Mrs.'s Clarks death certificate, our marriage certificate, as well as

my divorce decrees. How insane is this? Had we been told in 2004, we could have done so then, and not go crazy now trying to scramble for this information. All of the information that they requested is of course a matter of public record, thus they have access to it already. I feel that the only documentation that should have to be presented in this situation is the marriage certificate. That is an official document, thus being all that is needed. What about the young mother that was just recently killed in action and the grandparents have the child now and can't get benefits because they don't have proper documentation such as a will? For heavens sake, this is nuts. The young mother wrote on a paper that her benefits were to go to her child. What does it take to get someone to listen? The first and most important step in communication is listening. Can you tell me is anyone listening?

My sincere thanks,

Amy M. Clark